

To: Members of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament

Renewable Energy Directive must not promote unsustainable biofuels.

African Biodiversity Network

Tuesday 1 June 2008

Dear MEP,

We are writing to you on behalf of a network of African NGOs, the African Biodiversity Network. Our organisations are concerned with issues of agriculture, biodiversity, food security, livelihoods, climate change, traditional cultures and indigenous rights in Africa. We work with farming communities and indigenous peoples across the continent. We are writing because of our extreme concern about political decisions taking place in Europe, which will have widespread and disastrous impacts across Africa.

It is for these reasons that **we call on you to reject the 10% biofuel target in the upcoming vote on the Environmental Committee on the Renewables Directive**, taking place on the 7th July.

Biofuel developments are already having serious socio-economic and environmental impacts in Africa. If the 10% target is approved in the EU, we greatly fear that these negative impacts on biodiversity, communities and food security will accelerate.

Biofuel production is hungry for land, whether it is agricultural land, or land that has been forest or grassland. It must therefore either displace food production, areas of biodiversity, or land currently used to support the livelihoods of our communities (grazing, or gathering plants for food, medicine and income.)

We strongly challenge the myth that there is plenty of free land, going spare, in Africa. Farmers, pastoralists and indigenous peoples use these so-called "marginal" territories, but their existence and rights are often not recognised by their own governments. 70% of Africa's land is still communally owned. This makes us particularly vulnerable to biofuel developments that seek to privatise land and remove communities from their source of livelihood.

We challenge the myth that large-scale biofuel production will bring economic development benefits to Africans. We should not allow the promise of a few poorly paid, seasonal labour jobs to push farmers off their land, displace food production, and cut down forests. Judging from biofuel developments in Africa so far, biofuels will lead to large-scale evictions of farmers and indigenous peoples, huge "land grabs", rising food prices, deforestation, threat to conservation areas, poverty and debt for small scale farmers, and the most fertile, well-watered land changing from food to fuel production.

With food prices rising dramatically, and the rural poor in Africa the hardest hit, we must not further sacrifice our food security in order to keep European cars on the road. A car tank full of ethanol requires the amount of grain needed to feed a child for a year. It is getting harder and harder to feed our families and communities. We therefore hope you understand our anguish when we see the proposed EU 10% target, when we know it will only serve to increase our difficulties.

Some of the impacts that have already been observed include:

1) Displacing farmers and food security in Tanzania

The Tanzanian government has declared that 20% of the country's land may go towards biofuel production. Thousands of Tanzanian farmers growing rice and maize are already being evicted from fertile areas of land with good access to water, for biofuel sugar cane and jatropha plantations on newly privatised land. Villages are being cleared, but families have been given minimal compensation or opportunities for their loss of land, community and way of life. Evictions are taking place in Kisarawe District and the Usangu Plains, and tens of thousands of hectares in Bagamoyo and Kilwa districts are being given to foreign investors. In addition, the government has identified millions more hectares in at least 10 other districts.

2) Deforestation for biofuels in Uganda

In Uganda, plans to cut down thousands of hectares of the country's largest rainforest reserve, for a sugar plantation for ethanol are currently suspended, following civil protest on the issue. Such deforestation can threaten local water cycles, as Mabira Forest is a key water catchment area for Lake Victoria and the River Nile. Unfortunately, however, thousands of hectares of forest on Kalangala and Bugala Islands in Lake Victoria have already been cut down to make way for palm oil plantations.

3) Conservation areas threatened in Ethiopia

The government of Ethiopia has declared that 20% of the country's land is appropriate for biofuel production. Many foreign companies have already been allocated land from farmland, forests and wilderness areas. Even protected areas are not safe from the spread of biofuels. One European investor was granted 13,000 hectares of land in Oromia state – 87% of which is the Babile Elephant Sanctuary, a home to rare and endangered elephants.

4) A bad deal for out-growers in Zambia

Privatised plantations are not the only model of large-scale biofuel production in Africa. Some investors in Zambia are choosing to grow crops such as jatropha through huge numbers of out-growers, using contracts that last up to 30 years. These contracts serve to transfer control over production from the farmer to the company, through a system of loans, numerous extra charges and service payments, and prices determined by the company. Under such a system of dependence, farmers are likely to increase their indebtedness to the company, until they may be obliged to hand over their land altogether.

5) Biofuel land grabbing in Northern Ghana

A foreign biofuel investor took advantage of the traditional Ghanaian system of communal land ownership to claim and deforest large tracts of land in Kusawgu, Northern Ghana. Bypassing official development authorisation and using methods that hark back to the darkest days of colonialism, this investor claimed legal ownership of these lands by deceiving an illiterate chief to sign away 38,000 hectares with his thumbprint. When the affected community realised that the promised jobs and incomes were unlikely to materialise, and that the plantation would mean extensive deforestation and the loss of incomes from gathering forest products such as shea nuts, they successfully fought to stop the development. However, 2,600 hectares were already deforested. Many have now lost their incomes from the forest and face a bleak future. The company is now simply targeting its efforts further North.

6) Fuel or food in West Africa?

In West Africa, biofuels are also gaining momentum. Jatropha is already being grown in Togo, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. Senegal's president Abdoulaye Wade has enthused about an African "biofuels revolution" and placed fuel crops at the heart of an agriculture

renewal programme in his country. In Ghana one company is planning to plant one million hectares of Jatropha with support of the government, while in Benin another company has obtained permission to plant a quarter of a million hectares of biofuel crops. Farmers in Benin and in many other countries in the region have, on average, no more than 1 hectare to grow their products and the biofuels are expected to make a serious dent into their food production.

We do not believe that developing Sustainability Criteria for biofuels will be effective in preventing these negative impacts. Those developing the criteria admit that they cannot prevent socio-economic impacts such as rising food prices, nor can they prevent indirect land-use changes. (Indirect land-use change is when biofuel production takes place in agricultural land, displacing food production into forested or grassland areas. Biofuel production therefore still leads to deforestation.) Even if standards are agreed, monitoring and enforcing them on a large scale will be problematic. Genuine sustainability will not be possible. Biofuel targets should therefore not proceed based on this false hope.

We agree that action is required on Climate Change – we in Africa know this above all, as we are the most vulnerable. However, we think that biofuels are a false solution to climate change, which will only serve to weaken our ability to cope with the challenges ahead, and further threaten our food security.

We therefore hope that you will help to ensure that the EU continues to strive for genuine climate change solutions, while rejecting harmful initiatives. We hope that you will vote against the 10% biofuel target on the 7th July.

Yours sincerely,

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For further information, please visit the ABN website: www.africanbiodiversity.org and visit the resources page, to see the following documents:

- 1) ABN report: Agrofuels in Africa – the impact on land, food and forests
- 2) RAINS/ABN report: Biofuel land grabbing in Northern Ghana
- 3) An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments